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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply "carrying on the fight," but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines
Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to *editor.platypusreview@gmail.com*. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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About the Platypus Affiliated Society
The Platypus Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the "Old" (1920s-30s), "New" (1960s-70s) and post-political (1980s-90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

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The pandemic and the Left

Phedias Christodoulides

This article is based on the author's remarks given on the panel "Πανδημία και Αριστερά (The pandemic and the Left)," hosted by the Platypus Affiliated Society on November 19, 2021, the video of which can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=05axqEg5kcE>.

THE PANDEMIC AND ITS MANAGEMENT around the world have led to unprecedented negative changes in our way of life: we have seldom witnessed such a widespread and lasting restriction of our individual rights due to a pandemic or natural disaster, such as we see today. In my opinion, this restriction was imposed on us without its necessity having been sufficiently substantiated in public debate on the pandemic, and without adequate consideration of other, less authoritarian ways of managing it.

Although we constantly discuss the pandemic and its management, especially the medical and epidemiological features of the virus and the effectiveness and necessity of each individual measure, the public debate so far has not been the best. It is characterized both by state and media attempts to create a climate of panic, as well as by social cannibalism among citizens (especially between the vaccinated and the unvaccinated), with bad arguments and false data on all sides. This toxic climate is also prevalent on the Left, which is trapped in the technocratic and authoritarian logic of the existing management and has limited itself to calling for a more effective paternalistic state.

My goals in this article are twofold: to summarize the management and consequences of the pandemic worldwide, and to summarize the attitude of the existing Left towards the pandemic as opposed to what the attitude of a genuinely revolutionary Left would likely look like.

What we know and what we do not know regarding the pandemic

I do not intend to focus on the medical and epidemiological features of the coronavirus pandemic, but I will attempt to provide a brief summary of what we know *and what we do not know* with certainty regarding the pandemic.

Despite the huge amount of research and constant media reporting on the nature of the pandemic for almost two years, only two things can be said with certainty about it. One, that vaccines work: they do not prevent infection from the virus or its spread but only mitigate it, but they prevent serious illness from COVID, and hence also the collapse of our health systems. Two, that the infamous "Zero COVID" is an impossible, unrealizable goal. The virus tracking and tracing process was largely useless because it began too late: it is estimated that the virus had already spread to 3–4% of people in major metropolitan areas by March 2020.[1]

Let us now move on to whatever important things we do not know with certainty about the pandemic.

1. We do not yet know the mortality of the virus. This is very important: it makes a big difference whether the mortality rate is 0.2% as some say, or 2% as others say. Leading scientists claim that the mortality rate is extremely inflated and that detected COVID cases are far fewer than the actual number of cases. On the other hand, we had distinguished scientists like Dr. Ioannidis who early on greatly underestimated the possible number of deaths from the virus.

2. We do not know with certainty the effectiveness of natural immunity vis-à-vis vaccine immunity. Some scientists argue that natural immunity following infection is more protective than vaccination, while others argue the opposite.[2] In the U.S. you are not entitled to a safe pass if you have natural immunity, while in many European countries you are. Some scientists even claim that vaccines provide almost no protection against infection. A recent study from the University of Oxford characteristically notes that "the vaccine's beneficial effect on Delta transmission waned to almost negligible levels over time," a strong indication that transmissibility from infected vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals is similar.[3]

3. It is uncertain whether herd immunity is possible. At times its possibility has been strongly disputed, but there are many scientists, such as those behind the Great Barrington Declaration, who believe that it is possible. A few months ago, Professor Sir Andrew Pollard, president of the Oxford Vaccine Group, described the achievement of herd immunity as a "myth" due to the high transmissibility of the virus to and from vaccinated individuals.[4]

4. We do not know how the virus originated. For a long time the prevailing theory had been that the virus was transmitted to humans from animals, and this theory is still the most prevalent for many scientists. In recent months, however, the theory that the virus originated from a lab leak during gain-of-function research has gained ground. A senior official at the U.S. National Institute of Health admitted that the agency did indeed fund extremely dangerous research on bat-borne coronaviruses at the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Significantly, this theory was considered a conspiracy theory for the whole of 2020. It finally turned out that CDC director Anthony Fauci lied to Congress in saying that the U.S. did not fund gain-of-function research in Wuhan.[5]

5. Finally, we do not know with certainty how effective masking is.[6] Some masks offer much more protection than others, with the best providing 50% protection. The way we examine mask effectiveness, however, is not representative of how effective it is to enforce mask use, as participants in mask-effectiveness research wear the masks much more carefully and correctly than most people, changing them every few hours as appropriate, etc. Most people do not seem to wear the mask properly and carefully, thus the protection it provides is minimal.

In any case, it seems almost certain that the coronavirus is not a natural disaster — as the bourgeoisie wants to present it in order to avoid responsibility for it — but a disaster for which human social activity is responsible. The pandemic has both a social and a physical-biological dimension: we can say that it is a socially-mediated phenomenon with an impact on human biology, but it is also a natural phenomenon with an impact on society, given that the transmission and action of the virus is natural. As for whether the virus is the result of capitalism, I am not sure, as we have always had epidemics and laboratory accidents, and we may have them in socialism too. What we can say with certainty is that capitalism proved to be incapable of managing the pandemic rationally and effectively, as I will try to show in the next section.

The mishandling of the pandemic

The management of the pandemic was characterized by a climate of panic cultivated by governments and the media. This encouraged paranoia and terror, but also disobedience and resistance. A dose of panic may have been justified at the beginning of the pandemic, as we knew almost nothing about the virus at the time, but it is no longer justified and has had devastating consequences. Public health messages on COVID were often false and misleading, leading to counterproductive, damaging, and authoritarian policies such as lockdowns. For example, Fauci testified in Congress that mandatory mask use is useful more because it discourages socialization than for its inherent protective properties. Members of the Cyprioт government's epidemiological team said the same thing concerning mandatory outdoor masking.[7] The idea is that as long as people are required to wear a mask, they will be more "careful" when gathering, and will be less likely to go to bars and restaurants, etc. Therefore, it is an unnecessary demonstration measure that does not protect much from the virus: the spread occurs mainly in workplaces and private homes (at gatherings of family and friends) where we do not wear masks. It is also widespread in schools, but at least for primary-school children mask wearing does not seem very practical for obvious reasons.

Cyprus is an excellent example of irrational and authoritarian pandemic management. Three strict lockdowns were imposed upon us so far, with basic freedoms being violated with unprecedented ease. The Constitution of the Republic of Cyprus stipulates that the suspension of basic freedoms can only take place if a state of emergency is declared, which requires parliamentary approval. This approval was never granted. Instead, the Cyprioт government relied on an outdated colonial decontamination law to abolish the freedoms of movement, work, assembly, and demonstration, as well as the right of repatriation of Cyprioт citizens who were locked out of the Republic of Cyprus without any repatriation plan — the government required a negative COVID test to allow them to enter the country at a time when no state was providing tests for the general population, rendering repatriation virtually impossible.[8] The militarization of Cyprioт society also increased, with soldiers being used to suppress demonstrations and oversee the implementation of the pandemic decrees. In other words, the parliament, including the official opposition, allowed the executive branch to rule by unconstitutional decrees, oppressing and terrorizing the citizens. Decisions are being taken behind closed doors without accountability, without transparency, and without coordination with the wider civil society; they are announced and enforced from top to bottom in an increasingly militarized structure in which the government acts as society's ruler.[9]

What I wrote about Cyprus applies to a greater or lesser degree to several other countries. What has happened with the pandemic globally is that politicians have largely abdicated responsibility to public-health officials who have given priority to one thing, infection control, at the expense of all other social values and principles such as our civil rights. (The only other factor that plays an important role in the management is the economy.) Scientific debate and even research has been suppressed for the sake of having unanimity in public-health messaging. For example, the scientists and doctors who signed the Great Barrington Declaration against lockdowns were demonized and some were fired. The establishment and presence of epidemiological committees in decision-making was mainly employed to provide a veneer of scientific justification to the authoritarian policies of each government, making management technocratic.

Another major disadvantage of the pandemic's management is the phenomenon of conflicting announcements and measures implemented in different countries. For example, some countries use the AstraZeneca vaccine while others, such as Denmark, have discontinued both AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson's.[10] We were repeatedly promised that mass vaccination will save us from the pandemic, but as it turned out, this is not the case. In Cyprus, the government introduced a series of contradictory measures last November that likely promoted the spread of COVID instead of restricting it. The measures included what essentially amounted to a ban on access to open public spaces through limiting outdoor interaction to two people under the condition of using a mask, while keeping shopping malls, shops, cafés, churches, bars, and restaurants open. At the same time, the government imposed a curfew between 9:00pm and 05:00am, with most stores having to close at 7:00pm.[11] The result was crowded cafés, malls, and shops, an expected development given the curfew that reduces a person's free time to a few hours. As expected, the contradictory measures and information reduced the public's confidence in science and public-health management and encouraged conspiracy theories.

Public confidence in the management of the pandemic is further affected by the overt political exploitation of the pandemic. In Cyprus, the first measure taken was the partial closure of roadblocks to the Turkish-occupied areas at the end of February 2020, without similar measures at airports and ports, although there were COVID cases abroad and no cases in the occupied areas.[12] The measure, absurd from a health point of view, was clearly taken for political nationalist reasons.[13] Similarly, the Republic of Cyprus began violating international law under the guise of the pandemic, preventing boats carrying refugees from reaching the southern part of the island, leaving them to drown in the Mediterranean.[14] We had more of the same on the Mexico-U.S. border, with the Biden administration using the pandemic as a pretext to continue Trump's tough immigration policy.[15] As for the authoritarian measures of social control that have been adopted worldwide, I expect that some of them will stay with us forever unless we react.

It is also important to recognize that the pandemic is being managed in the context of austerity. The bourgeois class seeks to tackle the pandemic as economically as possible, shifting the burden of management to ordinary citizens through its rhetoric of "individual responsibility." There is a lack of development of treatment options for the virus as well as negligence in strengthening the health systems of several countries, resulting in the almost complete dependence of the management on mass vaccination. In Cyprus we did not have any substantial improvement in our health system, with the government forcing senior nursing students to staff hospitals without pay, and not even paying for the establishment of a functional vaccination-appointment

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"Rehabilitating the aesthetic"

An interview with Michael Wayne

D. L. Jacobs and Justin Spiegel

Platypus Affiliated Society members D. L. Jacobs and Justin Spiegel interviewed Michael Wayne, author of Red Kant: Aesthetics, Marxism and the Third Critique *(2014) in two parts: email and in-person conversation on December 2, 2021. What follows is an edited transcription of their discussions.*

D. L. Jacobs and Justin Spiegel: What led you to study Kant? What is its relevance for the Left today?

Michael Wayne: I started writing *Red Kant* around ten years ago so I cannot remember exactly what the route was to Kant. It became clear to me that Kant is part of the philosophical heritage of the Left as much as he is part of the philosophical heritage of bourgeois culture. Up to and including key figures in the Third International (1917 and its aftermath), revolutionaries were influenced by Kant's language on aesthetics. Was that entirely a bad thing? It is a little over-confident to suggest that a scientific Marxist aesthetics only really begins in the 1960s, and this aesthetic, which was grounded in structuralism, was not a particularly philosophical language about aesthetics specifically (as opposed to language in general). There is something in Kant that is part of the Left's history and not in an unfortunate way. Kant's language about the aesthetic is to be found in popular ideas today about what "art" does for people. Cutting ourselves off from that language because it does not sound "scientific" or because it sounds old fashioned or worse, "humanist," is a mistake. Marxists should engage and reconstruct that philosophical heritage, unpicking its sticky attachments to bourgeois culture and making it instead useful for radical change.

DJ & JS: You note that Marx had little to say about Kant during his time, but Theodor Adorno had a much more "dialectical view." What do you take as the reasons for this? What changed historically? How is this related to the history of the Left?

MW: There's no doubt that Hegel was the biggest single influence on Marx, and that Marxism comes out of Marx's struggle to transform the Hegelian dialectic into a historical and materialist philosophy. So it is entirely understandable that Kant plays a very minor role in Marx's reflections on his own precursors. Hegel's dialectic was infinitely more developed than Kant's version and is characterized by an explosive generative power that connects with Marxism's revolutionary politics. But there are at least two aspects of Hegel's dialectic as it is popularly interpreted that people have misgivings about, to which Kant becomes a kind of correction. Firstly, Hegel is interpreted as arguing that the parts of a system contain the essence of the whole and that can leave little room for parts to have any specificity or autonomy. The Italian philosopher Benedetto Croce instead drew on Kant to talk about a "dialectic of distincts." Kant's whole philosophical architecture, with his systems of cognitive, moral, and aesthetic judgment, might be seen as a dialectic of distincts (a structure also influential on Jürgen Habermas). It has the merit of preserving the distinctive operational activity of a region within an overall unity of sorts, or perhaps less favorably, as compartmentalized non-dialectical sections. Antonio Gramsci adopted this phrase "dialectic of distincts" to think about politics as a specific relatively autonomous practice.

The other aspect of the Hegelian dialectic that people have been concerned about is the temptation to resolve contradictions in the vulgarized version of the dialectic, where thesis is confronted with antithesis, which leads to synthesis. In the 20th century, after the rise of Stalinism, where the progressive dialectic of history looked to have stalled and turned into something else, this was a problem, especially because that something else claimed to be the culmination of the progressive dialectic of history. Thus Adorno was attracted to the structure of Kant's dialectic, which Kojin Karatani describes as a restless oscillation between distincts or poles. Kant's dialectic does not have that quality of breaking through (revolution) that Hegel's dialectic has, but also then it has less chance of being commandeered by the closure of dictatorship as a progressive synthesis. Hence Adorno's interest in developing a "negative dialectic" rather than a positive one. Kant has a different version of the dialectic, one less developed than Hegel but one that is still serviceable for certain tasks. At the same time we can give a Hegelian dialectical reading of Kant's limits and contradictions, which point to breakthroughs to come or had to come if there were to be advances.

DJ & JS: You make several mentions, throughout your book, of the "bourgeois" vs. the "anti-bourgeois" Kant. What do you take to be the substance of this distinction between bourgeois and anti-bourgeois? What does it mean to recover those aspects of Kant that are anti-bourgeois, and in what way would a project of emancipation from capitalism be characterized as bourgeois and/or anti-bourgeois?

MW: I used the term "bourgeois" as a little bit of a provocation, a way of reminding those who want the aesthetic to transcend the social of just how ingrained their version of the aesthetic is with the social. The term "bourgeois" may be useful to sketch in certain parameters within which various currents of thought and practice move. One of those parameters is a certain allergy to thinking of philosophy as historically and socially conditioned. For Georg Lukács, bourgeois culture is characterized by a set of structuring antinomies such as subject and object, structure and agency, necessity and freedom, fact and value, etc. Of course the term "bourgeois" will not tell you much that is specific and unique to the bewildering array of bourgeois currents of thought that have developed within the history of capitalism. For that you have to engage with those currents, but the limits implied by the term "bourgeois" also suggest how one might usefully engage with those currents in ways that are genuinely different, that are attuned to their historical and social conditions. I'll come back to that in a moment.

It is worth noting that I divide the bourgeois currents between the liberal and conservative strands on the one hand and what I call, provocatively, the "Left-wing" of the bourgeoisie. Here I include those thinkers who have passed through the linguistic turn of structuralism, post structuralism, postmodernism and so forth and return to Kant with that trajectory still imprinted on their thinking, but who also end up with quite conventional readings and uses of Kant. I am thinking of Gilles Deleuze, Steven Shaviro, and Jacques Rancière in particular. They are Left-wing to the extent that their positions are marked by an engagement with Marxism and in contrast to the traditional bourgeois aesthetics that has come out of analytic philosophy, with its rationalism, empiricism, and psychologism. The Left-wing bourgeois critics come out of continental philosophy, but they end up displaying a similar allergy to historical and social relations and conditions. They promulgate a different version of the bourgeois subject than analytic philosophy, one much more attuned to some of the needs and currents of advanced capitalism, which has less and less need for a subject that is stable and coherent or even one that has much investment in reason. Here the term "bourgeois" usefully suggests that, across the chasm that is analytic and continental philosophy, there are certain shared connections with capitalism that we might not otherwise see. But I never use the term "bourgeois" as a way of dismissing a body of thought; it is only an initial orientation.

It also helps us define how Marxists might produce anti-bourgeois philosophy. An anti-bourgeois reading of Kant is the subject of my book. I would say that it involves at least two things: firstly approaching a thinker or body of thought as a production and a productive response to fundamental problems in the social and historical situation surrounding it. Secondly, following the hermeneutic strategy of Marxist literary giants such as Pierre Macherey, Fredric Jameson, and Terry Eagleton, we have to see this production as contradictory because the social and historical situation is contradictory; we have to read it "against the grain." Each work of philosophy or art has an element of uniqueness about it — at least if it has any interest to us — in the way it tries to work through these contradictions. A Marxist reading of any text has not completed its job until it has brought out that singular element of a work. I am alluding here to the notion of immanent critique, working within the terms that a body of work itself is using, discovering the tensions and contradictions of the language as it internalizes the pressure of the historical and social situation it confronts, and then, in a Hegelian sublation, reconfiguring those terms in ways that may point beyond the horizon of capitalism. This allows us to avoid simply submitting a work to a set of standards that are foreign to it. It also means that a future philosophy and society can carry forth all that it needs from the past, from its historical inheritance. Marx practices immanent critique of classical political economy in *Capital*.

Immanent critique suggests a reading practice where you help a work elaborate solutions that were perhaps there in embryonic form but which could not, for various reasons, be worked through at the time, because it cannot escape its "bourgeois skin," as Marx said of political economy. With Kant it is clear that his work was structured by the antinomies of bourgeois thought that Lukács identified, such as between rationalism, with its pure form allergic to specific content, and empiricism, with its sensuous registering of the experiential, but unable to think the *a priori* conditions of the individual experiencing subject. But, whereas Lukács tended to regard Kant's work as set in a series of frozen antinomies, Lucien Goldmann and Adorno recognized the incipient dialectic that was at work within the philosophical architecture. For me, Kant's aesthetic turn was his attempt to work through the problems within his philosophy, and I think that it is interesting that the aesthetic is something to which philosophers turn, to help them because the aesthetic is good to think with. It helps us think against the pressures and limits which capitalism imposes on us. The aesthetic, when it is working well, that is to say when it puts in a challenge to commodification and class stratification, helps us think dialectically.

DJ & JS: Does "Red Kant" then only apply with the addition of his Third Critique (*Critique of Judgment*)? What do you see as the necessity of the Third Critique for Marxism and for future politics?

MW: No, I think the First Critique (*Critique of Pure Reason*) is also an incredible philosophical drama, and it is this drama which standard Marxist critics of Kant seem to miss. You have to read the First Critique to understand the Third Critique and see what elements in the First anticipate Kant's later aesthetic turn. For example, the First Critique asks, what makes experience intelligible, how is it decoded and processed? Here the transcendental subject (the *a priori* universal template that all individual empirical subjects must operate within) that is doing all this processing of experience is split between transcendental logic, which is the core of Kant's system, and a transcendental aesthetic, which is responsible for presenting experience in space and time. This is also, interestingly, where Kant talks about the "imagination," although it is what he calls the "reproductive imagination," that is subordinate to doing the manual labor of synthesizing phenomena in space and time, readying it to be stamped by the universal concepts of the understanding according to the principles of logic. But, it turns out that the universal concepts of the understanding are dependent on space and time. While they are still understood as ahistorical pure forms of intuition, the fact that causality for example, a key concept for Kant, cannot be intelligible unless it is imbued with a sense of temporality (for cause implies a before and after), gives space and time a certain potential. Space and time are central to the aesthetic and to figuration. Follow a curved or straight line and that is a temporal and spatial experience. What if the imagination has a modality where it no longer has to be merely "reproductive" of the concepts of the understanding? What if the imagination could be productive on its own account? Now figuration in space and time becomes a form of play. That might be particularly attractive when the philosophical model you have labored to produce turns out to leave little room for play, for freedom. The transcendental logic, the transcendental understanding of Kant's First Critique does two things: it maps out the means by which experience becomes structured and determinate according to the transcendental subject, and that has the great merit of going beyond empiricism and suggesting that yes, life is structured by certain "laws." But the First Critique also produces a very *deterministic* vision. Marx talks about Value, the great operations of capital in its movements of accumulation and competition stamping down on life, and Kant's First Critique also produces a great *stamping* machine; this is not coincidental.

But if in the Third Critique the aesthetic opens up a space for play, for creativity, for agency eliminated by the First Critique, that also has consequences for the world of "concepts." Here is where my reading of Kant differs from most other readings, which tend to accept that the Kantian aesthetic is *non-conceptual*. But, if you look at the architecture of Kant's philosophy, that reading, almost universally accepted, is not that secure. Because, in the First Critique he says that the operations of pure concepts depend on the operations of the pure Transcendental aesthetic. So if the aesthetic is doing something different in the Third Critique, moving from everyday experience to a mode of perception that we associate with the aesthetic experience, with "art," surely something is also happening to "concepts" as well. Yes, something is! Hopefully, if the aesthetic is working well, those concepts of the understanding, reinterpreted now as the dominant conceptual world of capitalism rather than some transcendental subject, are being de-reified to some degree. Kant moves back and forth around this throughout the Third Critique, but finally moves towards calling these new concepts, "aesthetic ideas." With aesthetic ideas, Kant anticipates the later German Marxist cultural tradition of dialectical images. The answer to the first part of your question is that the Red Kant has to be discovered in its germs in the First Critique.

This reading of the Third Critique is useful to Marxism and "future politics," because it rehabilitates the aesthetic in general and not just Kant's version of it. Marxism is nothing if not an example of critical thinking, thinking primarily with concepts, as befits any social science. But the aesthetic is a form of perceptual critical thinking and so it has a close affinity with the project and ambitions of Marxism. As a form of perceptual thinking, the aesthetic is less burdened with the restrictive circles in which conceptual thinking is typically developed; although the aesthetic does have its elitist institutions and practices, the popular aesthetic is a democratic space that Marxism must be interested in, not least because it will find there, in popular and often intuitive forms, sentiments and ideas that connect with its analysis. The aesthetic is important to Marxism because play, imagination, pleasure, agency, and discussion ought to be important to Marxism, and expanding the possibilities for such modes of sociality ought to be the goal of any redistribution of wealth and transformation of production. Finally, given our current impasse in history, where there does not seem to be a collective subject that can form to challenge capitalism, it is vital that we keep alive the imaginative possibility of doing so, and here too the aesthetic is a friend to Marxism and any transformative politics. For example, aesthetics always harbors a utopian strand to it, a pronounced dissatisfaction with the way things are and a desire for change. We have to keep that desire flickering and fan it in a direction that capitalism cannot co-opt and channel to revivify itself as it so often does, e.g., with all those utopian hopes of change that emerged in the 1960s.

DJ & JS: You mention that Kant's turn to labor in paragraph 43 of the Third Critique is his "materialist turn." Can you say more about that and why it is important for the Left?

MW: It seems that in the Third Critique, out of nowhere, Kant makes a materialist turn towards craft production. This is hugely significant because he is here, for the first time, translating his philosophy into explicitly materialist terms. In fact he has already laid the groundwork for this earlier on, in the introductions (there are two). Kant offers us a philosophy of natural science, where he says that in order to explore nature, scientists have to perform certain mental tricks of the mind and assume that nature is purposeful. This then branches off into a philosophy of aesthetics, because once he has introduced this notion of adopting an imaginative relation to what was in the First Critique a purely deterministic vision of all nature (including the human being), he expands his thought about what that imaginative relation to nature implies. But then there is a third philosophy emerging, very latent and only available to us retrospectively: the philosophy of historical materialism, which is also founded on our species having a *creative* relationship to nature via human labor. Just how anticipatory Kant is of historical materialism at this point is evidenced by his passage on the honeycomb that bees make. We may call this a "work of art," but this is wrong because only the human being builds with rational deliberation not instinct. Marx takes this passage over into *Capital* in his own famous analogy between bees and architects, except he is even more "romantic" than Kant at this point, and talks not about rational deliberation, but the imagination! We have it, bees don't. It's extraordinary how little recognized it is that Marx was here completely in Kant's debt. The importance of Kant's materialist turn to labor, to production is not only that it begins to ground his philosophy of the aesthetic in ways that bourgeois appropriations of Kant have thoroughly disavowed, but it also brings the language of the aesthetic *into* the language of production, of labor. This is why it is important that Marx talks about the imagination in the discussion of bees and architects. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that Marx had an instrumentalist view of human labor as Habermas thought. Human labor is creative for Marx. That does not mean there is no difference between the kind of labor we need, without which things would get sticky pretty quickly, and cultural production, but they are not to be opposed to each other as yet another antinomy. Craft labor is important because it is a form of labor that precedes capitalism; it is a form of labor that continues within capitalism, especially around aesthetic work (such as film or music making or visual arts); and it is a model of labor for a future socialist society. Aesthetic labor can and has put up some intrinsic resistance to its abstraction. It remains stubbornly concrete and the struggle between concrete and abstract labor was the centerpiece of Marx's critique of capitalist political economy.

DJ & JS: You write that the Marx of *Capital* takes more seriously the mystifying power of the cash nexus, or money relation, whereas the Marx of the *Communist Manifesto* still saw in "the development of the cash nexus a laying bare of the new more clearly defined class relations of capitalism." Could you describe in more detail Marx's apparently changed view of this cash nexus, from the *Manifesto* to *Capital*? Further, how is this change in Marx's view anticipated by Kant's Third Critique? How, if at all, is Marx's changing relationship to bourgeois society and categories anticipated within the trajectory of bourgeois thought itself?

MW: The Marx of *The Communist Manifesto* was still to develop a theory of fetishism, which is to say that he had still to develop an account of how the very practices of capitalism make it difficult to penetrate to its essential qualities. This is because in 1848 his theory was still in development and because the political context was hopeful as revolutions and insurrections were breaking out across Europe. By the time Marx is writing *Capital*, capitalism has consolidated itself. Part of that consolidation was how, in its very DNA, its very operations at a day-to-day level, it produces phenomenal forms, the kind of empirically based cognitions which Kant's First Critique sets out to describe, that conceal fundamental aspects of how it operates, a noumenon that is the social unconscious. Hence the famous section on the "Fetishism of Commodities and the Secret Thereof" in *Capital*. Here the cash nexus does not lay anything bare. Quite the contrary. The commodity is "a mysterious thing" because "a definite social relation between men [...] assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things."

Kant's perspective is very interesting here, because for Kant, the world of things is always mediated by the subject, although it was the transcendental subject; and this subject became "thingified" because it could not alter anything, but could only obey laws of the transcendental subject. It was a very strange subject and mediation that Kant was proposing — an agency that was also not an agency. The inability to rescue a moral-political dimension from this cognitive model (and that is precisely a sign of fetishism: things, impervious to moral-political standards, dominate the subject) was deeply troubling to Kant.

It is extraordinary that in his turn towards the aesthetic Kant anticipates Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, and so as you say, in a nice formulation, Marx's changing relationship to bourgeois society is anticipated within the trajectory of bourgeois thought itself. In the Third Critique Kant talks about "subreption," which means a "secret seizure." For Kant, it refers to the way the subject, when confronted with the sublime, in the form of immense power and/or size, feels that their awe is the product of what the object is doing to them. But for Kant, this brackets off what the transcendental subject is doing to the object, which, in the Third Critique, is much closer to a historical and social subject than the First Critique. Kant comes close to saying that our ability to respond aesthetically to nature is the result of our humanization of it. Thus an emergent sense of social relations is evident here, although capitalism will, as it consolidates, force that emergent sense back: as awareness of social relations retracts into the thingified object world of commodities. That is one form of fetishism, but Kant is still working within another form of fetishism and that is the fetishism of the subject. Marx, building on Hegel, will transform the transcendental subject into a historical subject of material relations in which labor is a central feature. This too is a condition of beauty, which starts with developing standards inherent in the usefulness of our productions.

DJ: How did you come to be interested in Marxism? And as well as Kant along the way?

MW: I was not a great student in what we call comprehensive education in the UK. I was a very average student, not that interested in learning and education. Going to University was not something I had actually thought about until someone mentioned it to me as a possibility. It's not something that my family would have thought about pushing me towards. I ended up going to the Polytechnic of North London (at a time when we had a Polytechnic and University 'two-tier' sector). It was a complete transformation for me. I was introduced there to ways of thinking that don't exist at Secondary School level. I found it incredibly stimulating and it was mind-expanding, personality transforming: my relationship to education changed. I became a very good student, thinking about maybe having a career in Academia. That is where I was introduced to Marxism by the faculty and students. It was a very politicized moment in 1985 as when I started at the Polytechnic: there had just been (the year before) a big scandal around a fascist provocateur: a student had just outed himself as a member of the National Front. The students had big campaigns, trying to shut the university down, trying to get him pushed out. So it was a very militant politicized student body. The atmosphere was conducive to a kind of politicization. That's where I was really introduced to Marxism.

DJ: Were there some Left groups or revolutionary organizations or professors in particular that really showed you Marxism?

MW: Both of those. There was the Socialist Workers student society, which is linked to the Socialist Workers Party, who were very active and militant and had quite a strong leading role in at least two or three student occupations while I was there. There were a few faculty members that were influential but one that was clearly Marxist was my film studies lecturer. He had come from a background from which you wouldn't probably get into the university sector now, because he was a librarian of some kind then he went into higher education. He didn't publish or do much research. So he wouldn't survive now, but he was a fantastic teacher, and very inspiring for not just me, but many other students in my cohort.

DJ: You mentioned in one of your responses that you don't quite know when you came to Kant; he just seemed to be part of the philosophical heritage of the Left. But we thought it was interesting that you said, "up to and including key figures in the Third International and its aftermath, revolutionaries were influenced by Kant's language on aesthetics." We are obviously living in an era that is much below the revolutionary potential and organization of the Internationals. Can you explain both what Kant's aesthetics meant to them, and also, how you see a study of Kant as potentially pointing towards the reconstitution of revolutionary politics?

MW: A good figure to think about in terms of the Third International and the influence of Kant would be A. K. Voronsky and his book *Art as Cognition of Life*, especially the chapter of the same title. If you read Voronsky, I don't think there's any real explicit reflection on Kant, but you can see Kantian themes, e.g., the idea that the aesthetic is a special kind of experience that is different from natural science and critical social science and Marxism. That's a language that was there in Kant and subsequently developed in the Romantic tradition.

Interestingly though, Voronsky says that it is still a form of cognition. If he is representative, it is interesting that for them, there was not this antinomy between sensuousness and feelings and cognition. Rather, it's just differentially cognitive. That is anticipating my argument. It is tacit there, but unlike the bourgeois version of Kant, which insists on the non-conceptuality of the aesthetic, he was quite happy to talk about it as some kind of cognition. That is what connects the aesthetic to Marxism.

DJ: you write in your book, "in short, Kant wants to use the aesthetic not to propose a non-conceptual mode of Consciousness." This is part of your criticism, of what you call the dominant tendency or the dominant interpretation of *Critique of Judgment*: "but a new and different type of relationship between sensuousness and conceptuality, which would later come to be known within Marxism as praxis." Can you elaborate on that theme of how you see what Kant is articulating in the Third Critique as what is understood as praxis and Marxism? How does that relate to the more general Marxist question of theory and practice?

MW: You have to go back to the First Critique, which is asking how experience is intelligible. Kant comes up with this philosophical apparatus, the transcendental subject, which makes the subject lawful in a universal way, which is different from Hume. For Hume, it's convention, habit, and custom that regulate experience. That's far too empirical for Kant, who constructs a determinate transcendental subject that obeys certain laws. The problem with it is that it is also very reified. It is not only determinate; it is also very deterministic. It's a reified philosophical structure that we construct, and that means that the subject does not have much capacity to intervene in this world of cognitive sensuous experience using moral political reasoning, because there just isn't the freedom to do that. Everything is already predetermined, determined by these laws. That cannot be changed.

So one was one of the antinomies in his philosophy (*a priori* "laws" vs. moral-political freedom) that he's trying to overcome and one form that takes is this reified concept of the world and the sensuous content of experience. So you've got a transcendental form versus empirical, sensuous content. That's one antinomy. Another antinomy looks like a kind of emerging sense of a social structure in philosophy, which is what makes it attractive to Marxists. But, there's no space for the individual either. You actually can't really see where the individual as an individual can be there. It's a very abstract place and of course that is what the Third Critique is trying to also bring back into play: both a sense of moral reason and an individuated consciousness that makes judgments, as opposed to the judgments of this kind of transcendental machine.

DJ: A stamping machine, I think you are referring to.

MW: Yes. Overcoming those antinomies is the project of Marxism and it has been described as a kind of praxis. What that involves would be a moral reason

or theory able to interact with empirical experience, the sensory world, and to change it. This theory would have to go beneath the phenomenal sensory world and understand the deeper structures; what Kant calls the supersensible world.

JS: I want to ask a follow-up question, relating to the antinomies and specifically Kant's First Critique. For Kant, the antinomies demonstrate the necessity of this distinction between the phenomenon and the noumenon. At the end of his lectures on Kant's First Critique, Adorno identifies the noumenon or the thing-in-itself as being Kant's materialist motif.[1] To paraphrase, the noumenon is inexhaustible in terms of mediation by the transcendental subject so it will never be completely subsumed under the rubric of the forms that enable objectively valid experience. In turn, Kant's First Critique could be seen as an attempt, Adorno says, "to master through mere concepts, all that cannot be mastered by concepts."[2] How does this motif stay with Kant? Or is it somehow dropped or transformed by his Third Critique?

MW: The noumenon is an interesting intellectual move. Kant points to all this stuff his system cannot explain, and he puts it into this category, this "X," the noumenon, and this includes things that would have been a concern to him that are less interesting to us: the soul, God, immortality. But it also includes something very interesting to ask questions about, such as moral-political freedom and even hints of realities which exist independently of the transcendental subject. Because the transcendental subject is a weird thing that assimilates everything that it gets to know into its own structures — a giant tautology that never goes outside itself by definition. It is this model of identity thinking that Adorno is talking about. What happens to the noumenon in the Third Critique is that it becomes the supersensible world, beyond the phenomenal appearances, which is what the First Critique is all about. Kant's core concept that begins to access the supersensible world is the concept of reflective judgment.

The reflective judgment is interesting because he says very explicitly, in the reflected judgment, that the universal is not given. He is saying, "this whole philosophical architecture, which I constructed in the First Critique — I've now come up with a mode of judgment where all of that is not given; it's kind of suspended."

Well, what's happening is he defines reflective judgment as the comparison of presentations, which generates an idea in order to distinguish it from the concept. But he says reflective judgment generates an idea that is not possible or was not able to be thought before the presentations. That is essentially an early definition of the dialectical image: this clash of presentations generates thought, opens up horizons, escapes the merely empirical phenomenal world of appearances and generates something beyond that. For Marx and Marxism that "something" will be deeper structures that are structuring phenomenal appearances — the social unconscious.

DJ: This leads into my next question and came up in the first set of questions about Hegel, but also concerns Engels and the Third International. Marxists usually took Hegel's critique of Kant's noumenon, right? Hegel says this is a vacuous abstraction, and Engels also has a critique of it in *Ludwig Feuerbach*. Lenin agrees with Hegel against Kant, and Lukács does as well. This is another figure that comes up in your text. Do you think there have been certain problems in adapting that view in terms of Kant? As you put it in your text, "Kant's concept of the noumena lays the foundations for just this sort of breakthrough."[3]

MW: I can't pretend to be well-versed in neo-Kantianism. My sense is that — and this might have influenced some of the Marxist readings that you're talking about — the noumenon was an embarrassment; it's an odd thing. Can you imagine an academic writing a book: "There's a lot of stuff I can't explain; here's my self critique." They didn't know what to do with it. So they just say, "well, it's metaphysical. Let's tidy Kant up and get rid of the noumenon." But, by tidying Kant up and getting rid of the noumenon you're actually removing something interesting, and you're performing a reading of Kant that is not useful. We should approach Kant in the same way that the giants of Marxist literary criticism approach a literary text: it is the contradictions that make it interesting, which is also something that Adorno says as well, he's reading the first Critique with Siegfried Kracauer. In his published lectures from 1959, which I'm very indebted to, Adorno says this: philosophy is interesting or great to the extent to which it flaunts and displays its contradictions and doesn't try to tidy them up. You can see why that would have obviously appealed to the author of *Negative Dialectics*. That's why you get these Marxist readings to some extent. It could also be that Kant is so securely part of bourgeois culture, and that Kant is used as an anti-Hegelian weapon. But, the intellectual currents and life are more complicated than that.

DJ: I think that's what Adorno tries to do: play a kind of dialectic of Kant and Hegel. This leads into another question I had. You have these two great quotes at the beginning of the book: one is from *The German Ideology*, where Kant is relegated to a time when there's not yet classes, but no longer Estates. However, Adorno has a bit more of a sympathetic reading of Kant on a threshold, and you end your text by saying that what Kant was doing in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is providing *"a priori* grounds for experience which an increasing awareness of social structure demanded," that there was a need.[4] Hegel characterizes Kant in the same way — that he's part of the revolution of this new society: "In the philosophy of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, the revolution to which in Germany mind has in these latter days advanced, was formally thought out and expressed [...]."[5] Do you think this also applies to the *Critique of Judgment*, that there was a need in modern bourgeois society? What has become of these Critiques historically? You said that the First Critique has a tendency towards reification. Do you think that capitalist production is also able to use what's articulated in the Third Critique, or do you think that resistance against reification remains?

MW: Both. Typically the Third Critique is linked to the birth of Romanticism, which was very often seen as and was a part of a revolutionary tradition and culture in which human agency and well-being were to the fore against various degradations of the human being. It was part of the bourgeois revolution, which in some ways was against capitalism, as well as laying the foundations for capitalism. You see that in the French Revolution: it is establishing bourgeois relations, clearing out the feudal aristocracy, and generating debates and perspectives that are going to be taken up by the Left against capitalism and against the bourgeoisie. It is a deeply ambivalent moment.

The aesthetic generally can be both appropriated by capitalism and used in different ways. There are two big institutions. Under mass culture it can be either commodified, in which case it is inclusive and popular, but degraded and standardized as a tendency, although obviously that's a massive generalization. Or the other big institution is the art institutions, in which case you've got deep class stratification as the key sign of integration into capitalism despite the wider scope for cultural freedom. Both institutions are sites of struggle. The formulation I use is that when the aesthetic is working well it is a form of critical perceptual thinking. That is important for Marxism and important for the Left.

DJ: In your text, you say when the aesthetic is working well, it could serve as a strategy for de-reification. I wanted to bring up the second part of Lukács's "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" (1923), "The Antinomies of Bourgeois Thought," which appears to be a criticism of using the aesthetic as a form of de-reification, because he sees that it could, as he puts it, intensify the fetish. That is, if you treat the commodity world as nature in the way that Kant says we treat nature like art, then it can also be a means of giving a veil to the commodity fetish. Could you elaborate more on what you mean by the aesthetic working well as a means of de-reification?

MW: Adorno says the same thing about nature: its merging with the aesthetic can work to intensify capitalist commodification by tapping into desires we have to escape it and then trapping us within it even more firmly. A lot of the tourism industry would fall into that, but then also a lot of spectacles of nature, through those various regimes of representation, would fall into that. That they are real needs goes back to Hans Magnus Enzensberger's "Constituents of a Theory of the Media," which notes how utopian longings get appropriated.[6] The utopian longings are authentic, but the way they get captured is problematic.

There's a whole range of ways in which the aesthetic works well. It is quite regular. Film is my area of interest and I think it's quite routine for the aesthetic to raise interesting and challenging questions about the society that we live in. There are many conversations that recognize both specialized critical discourses, but also everyday conversations. Lots of popular cinema is very paradoxically alive to some of the negative consequences of capitalism, even though it is produced by a capitalist industry.

JS: These changed conditions are massified consumption and massified politics, right? I wanted to ask how those possibly transform this possibility of a critical and universally communicable aesthetic experience, specifically even through film or any other sort of mass media.

MW: One obvious example would be a whole stream of films that are responding to Black Lives Matter. Gillo Pontecorvo once said, "the capitalist entrepreneur would sell their mother if they could make a buck out of it." So if you can sell them revolutionary politics because it is popular, they'll do it. If there is something in the culture that is generating sizable discontents, that constitutes an audience, a market. For us, it constitutes a public. That is why two quite opposing value systems and interests might meet and converge in a film. With film in particular, as the scriptwriter William Goldman famously said, "nobody knows anything." The producers don't know what is going to be a hit; that puts them into the hands of creatives a bit more. This relates to what Kant might call the singularity of the aesthetic. Although there are all sorts of ways to try to standardize film with various templates, there are limits to that. Thus there is an area around the nature of cultural production, being a little bit more resistant to interchangeability and standardization than other forms of production. That's difficult to do with craft labor.

Concerning the singularity of cultural products in a mass context, producers don't know what's going to be successful. So you can get something like *Get Out* (2017), which was a low-budget film. They had no idea that it was going to be a runaway success. Then, in capitalist fashion, they all jump on the bandwagon, and that opens up more opportunities at least for a period of time before that market collapses and they move on to something else. But it is quite a chaotic system in which people can work the system.

DJ: You have some discussion about this in your text on paragraph 43 ("Of art in general") of Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Do you think craft labor is more free than labor under capitalism? I bring that up because of Marx's critique of people like Proudhon, who see such labor as more free. But we have to realize the potential of industrial production; we can't go back to what Proudhon wants. With respect to art, this is a question that Walter Benjamin has in "The Author as Producer" and "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" — of the dialectic of industrial production and art. How do you realize that potential? In terms of what you're talking about here, it would seem like the point is still not to have just simply more craft labor, but rather to find the potential for art in the deskilling aspect.

MW: It depends on what you mean by deskilling. I would not call deskilling the progressive side of industrial production. The progressive side would be actually the dissemination of skills to a much wider group of people. We see that with film, in terms of increased access to shoot on cameras and edit, compared to a cinematographer 60-70 years ago — the amount of knowledge that they would have had to have to perform their job. It means that a lot of other people can also participate in this without a high level of knowledge. That's a democratic process that I would not describe as deskilling. The skilled cinematographers, editors, etc. still exist, but those skills have also been simplified by technology so that wide layers of people can participate in cultural production at a level that is watchable. Filmmaking is a craft product and an industrial product. Hollywood production, industrial production, is also craft production. It has an ineliminable craft component. Set-designers, makeup artists, special-effects directors, camera people — they are craft workers.

DJ: Going back to Justin's question and returning to the question I mentioned earlier when I read Kant, it seems he can talk about his three critiques as a system and that it doesn't seem to bother him as much. In Kant's letter to his friend Reinhold, he notes that the *Critique of Judgment* will complete his system.[7] Whereas in our conversation, there seems to be the need to go beyond merely making an aesthetic judgment and theoretically cognizing it. Then there is this moral and political question. Above you mentioned our current historical impasse and the lack of a collective subject that could challenge capitalism. How does Kant point towards the reconstitution of a collective subject and what would it recapture? You were talking about the democratization of art, but what about Kant could potentially help? Is it the realization of art under capitalism? In other words, art under capitalism is going to require the political transformation and social transformation to truly realize its desiderata.

MW: I would formulate it differently. I wouldn't say Kant is going to help us reconstitute radical politics. There is a whole series of mediations between Kant and that and the big mediation is Marxism. Someone said to me, " we need Kantian-Marxism." I thought, no, that is not what I'm doing. There is Marxism that has reconstructed and seized Kant as an important philosophical resource. It gives us a language that the three founding philosophies of Marxism don't. Neither Political economy nor politics gives us a language to talk about art. Philosophy is a little bit closer, but it's not specifically about art. There is a gap which explains why Kant was still influential for Marxists up until World War II.

In terms of the relationship between art and cultural production and revolutionary politics. Art seeds stuff that may or may not get taken up by the political situation. Another way of thinking about this is Raymond Williams's notion of structure of feeling: below the radar of what society acknowledges, there's all this other stuff bubbling away, which can become converted into political and institutional realities. At some point, these aesthetic seeds have to be turned into something else, into political movements and practices.

If you think about British politics and culture in the 1930s, you see a seeding of this social democratic state that would emerge, in cultural projects like Mass Observation and the documentary film movement. Already bits of it were starting to be built, as far back as the liberal Lloyd George governments, but what we came to know as the social democratic state happened after 1945. If the situation in history had gone a different way those seeds would never have sprouted. But here the aesthetic played its part by nudging people in certain directions that then politics could take up and institutionalize. Another way of thinking about it is the relationship between civil society and the state in Gramscian terms. The state or the revolutionary founding of a new state is educated by civil society and by what's going on in civil society, including cultural practices.

JS: Do you take up the temporal dimension in relating the usefulness of art for politics? Could art be immediately useful for the reconstitution of socialist politics, or rather is its utility something that might become operative in the future when the past can be reactivated in a certain sense? How does our past relate to the present, and how might one politically register this relationship of past and present art?

MW: It could be both. Cultural traditions and even radical new forms are always dependent upon or recycling stuff from the past. There's never a blank slate, is there? That would be very anti-historical thinking and that is a problem with the avant-garde, isn't it? This attitude of "it all starts from today" found in the Russian avant-garde was a problem that the Bolsheviks rightly critiqued. Trotsky said, "we Marxists, we live in tradition," including cultural traditions. There's a long-temporal as well as immediate-temporal dimension.

DJ: With regard to historical impasses, while reading your text, I was reminded of Platypus's slogan, which has an aesthetic dimension: "The Left is dead, long live, the Left!" This points to an attempt to take history as it has come down to us in order to transform it in a new way. We try to take the failures of the past Left, the defeats of Marxism, and try to turn these liabilities into assets. How do you see Kant's aesthetic interacting with the question of history?

MW: One of the big failures of the Left is the failure of not combining revolutionary politics with democracy sufficiently. Many of the Marxist regimes that established themselves were regressions compared to the achievements of bourgeois democratic politics of the 20th century. The link there to the aesthetic and Kant, is that the aesthetic is a democratic space. This comes back to that word judgment in the end, which is another weakness of the Left: a wariness about the individual as a category, conflating the individual with bourgeois individualism's possessive ethos. But if you read Marx, especially the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, there is a hymn to the individual. He's trying to overcome the antinomy between individual and collective or social, which cannot be overcome by subsuming the individual into a collective. You have to work it through. The individual, the individuated Judgment, which Kant tries to rescue in the Third Critique, is valuable.

Where is the capacity for critical reason? The individual is not an isolated atom. We all rely on the collective resources, but it is the individual that has to operate those collective resources. I'm thinking about the transcendental subject and perception: it is the individual that has to make those judgments. What is your position on this or that question, should we have mandatory vaccinations? Should there be an apartheid system for those who don't get vaccinations?

The Left really needs to embrace critical judgment and criticize everything, as Marx said, ruthlessly. Everything should in principle be up for debate. On COVID and vaccination — the Left is very uncritical of Big Pharma, because it is science, isn't it? It's got to be "pure." Every other big corporation gets critiqued, but not Big Pharma for some reason. That's an important lesson about individuated judgment, which is a commitment to the democratic ethos. The aesthetic helps with that. **|P**

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[1] Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

[2] Ibid., 234.

[3] Michael Wayne, *Red Kant: Aesthetics, Marxism and the Third Critique* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 52.

[4] Ibid., 195.

[5] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, M. A. (London: Kagan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1896), 409, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/hp/hpconten.htm>.

[6] Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media," *New Left Review* 64 (Nov/Dec 1970).

[7] Letter from Kant to Carl Leonard Reinhold, December 28 and 31, 1787.

"The pandemic and the Left" cont. from page 3

majority of whom belong to the working class — than with the real threat which is the authoritarian bourgeois state. The far Right, though, is just as marginal and weak as the Left: it is not an immediate social danger. Essentially, the majority of the Left and of the so-called "progressives" and "liberals" act as a state crutch in the management of the pandemic.

What is to be done

What would a genuine Left do differently in response to the pandemic? As the Spartacist League rightly points out in its article on the virus:

> The working class derives its social power from its role in production. The labor movement needs to *oppose* layoffs and furloughs by fighting for union-run hiring and training, and for a shorter workweek with no loss in pay in order to spread work among all hands. The current crisis cries out for *increased* production and services: more and better medical care; mass construction of public housing; spacious and well-ventilated buildings for schools and day care; better public transport. Reopening and expanding the economy is necessary to meet the needs of working people and to combat unemployment and pauperization [...] Unions are the elementary defense organizations of the working class. Their purpose is to defend workers on the job, not fight for the workers to stay home.[22]

In other words, a genuine revolutionary Left acting in accordance with the class interest of the working class would pursue the opposite pandemic policy from that of the current Left. In the first place, it would oppose lockdowns, layoffs, and working from home, and would fight for safe working conditions and better health and transport infrastructure. It would work to ensure that the pandemic's management does not restrict our freedom and does not lead to social isolation. It would also require the abolition of patents, so that vaccines and drugs can be mass-produced and meet the needs of the Third World. In the long run, it would fight for control of healthcare and safety to pass into the hands of our own labor organizations such as unions, as well as for the expropriation of hospitals and pharmaceutical companies.

It is impermissible for Leftists to agree with the bourgeoisie when it tells us that the struggle of the workers for their interests through unionization and demonstrations threatens public health. The organization and conduction of class struggle is necessary for our self-defense and for combatting the social cause of the mismanagement of the pandemic, that is, of capitalism. As Leon Trotsky put it in *The Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International*: "In a society based upon exploitation, the highest morality is that of the social revolution. All methods are good which raise the class-consciousness of the workers, their trust in their own forces, their readiness for self-sacrifice in the struggle. The impermissible methods are those which implant fear and submissiveness in the oppressed in the face of their oppressors."[23] Cultivating fear of the virus and submissiveness to the state's administration is unacceptable.

The historical task of the Left is to form the working class into an independent political force seeking the overthrow of capitalism. To achieve this historic task it is necessary, among other things, to channel any generalized discontents of the working class against its real enemy, that is, against the bourgeoisie and its state. This also holds for the current widespread dissatisfaction of many people with the handling of the pandemic. A genuine revolutionary Left must recognize and highlight the rational core of this dissatisfaction, while simultaneously directing the discontented masses away from irrational and/or reactionary conspiracy theories. A real revolutionary Left would mobilize the working class to defend all the oppressed and unite them on the side of the workers in the class struggle. It would not allow the Right and the far Right to present themselves as defenders of our democratic rights, as is the case with COVID.

We are living through one of the greatest crises in the history of capitalism, and the task of the Left is to make use of and lead the working class's dissatisfaction with the state, not to support the bourgeois state against the working class. Until that happens, the state will continue to play games with our health and our way of life. There is no true health without freedom, and there is no possibility of freedom without the Left. Given the absence of a real Left today, it is our duty to build it. What is needed is new leadership of the working class. **|P**

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[1] "What Happened: Dr. Jay Bhattacharya on 19 Months of COVID," Hoover Institution, October 13, 2021, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zG7XZ2JXZqY>.

[2] Julie Steenhuysen and Manas Mishra, "Prior COVID infection more protective than vaccination during Delta surge - U.S. study," *Reuters*, January 19, 2021, available online at <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/prior-COVID-infection-more-protective-than-vaccination-during-delta-surge-us-2022-01-19/>.

[3] Smriti Mallapaty, "COVID vaccines cut the risk of transmitting Delta — but not for long," *Nature*, October 5, 2021, available online at <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-021-02689-y>.

[4] Natalie Grover, "Delta variant renders herd immunity from COVID 'mythical,'" *The Guardian*, August 10, 2021, available online at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/aug/10/delta-variant-renders-herd-immunity-from-COVID-mythical>.

[5] Tiana Lowe, "NIH admits Fauci lied about funding Wuhan gain-of-function experiments," *Washington Examiner*, October 20, 2021, available online at <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/opinion/nih-admits-fauci-lied-about-funding-wuhan-gain-of-function-experiments>.

[6] Cf. David Zweig, "The CDC's flawed case for wearing masks at school," *The Atlantic*, December 16, 2021, available online at <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/12/mask-guidelines-cdc-walensky/621035/>.

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Consciousness is essential — why the death of the Left is consequential

A rejoinder to Benedict Cryptofash

Chris Cutrone

BENEDICT CRYPTOFASH CRITICIZES me for using the "Left" as a concept for its alleged idealism and metaphysical essentialism.[1] But by identifying the "Left" with a group of people, e.g. members of *Jacobin*/DSA et al., Cryptofash reifies the phenomenon of the Left, and in the worst possible way, by personalizing it. But even in colloquial discourse it is well understood that Left and Right represent principles not people. This is why someone who was a Leftist can become a Rightist: he can change his mind.

The Left is not a thing but rather expresses a process; moreover the Left refers to the tendency or force of a historical process. Aaron Benanav criticized Platypus for its preoccupation with the Left rather than with class — similar to the criticism of Platypus by my old ex-comrades of the Spartacist League[2] — and referred as Cryptofash does to the Left as the Left-wing of capitalism, as if this disqualified the concept.[3] But Marxism always considered itself to be the consciousness of the historical tendency of capitalism that pointed beyond it and that was necessary in order to actually get beyond it. For instance, Lenin considered the Marxist approach to socialism to be overcoming capitalism on the basis of capitalism itself. But that tendency was self-contradictory in that it pointed both further beyond capitalism but also back to the reconstitution of its historical roots in bourgeois society — the society of labor. The modern labor movement of the proletarianized working class was itself the core engine of capitalist development, driving the industrial development of production, which contradicted and undermined and destroyed its bourgeois social relations, producing crisis. The problem with the present Left — and for the past hundred years — is that it no longer expresses the emerging and developing consciousness of the subject of a historical tendency — proletarian socialism — but rather the memory of something that proceeds today seemingly objectively — without a corresponding political movement aiming to go beyond it. In the absence of such a subjective consciousness of history as a phenomenon in practice, capitalism itself appears to regress.[4] This regression is something that can be observed in both long-term and short-term political processes.

In my previous article in this thread, I tried to explain very briefly the mind of original historical Marxism as a political movement.[5] I will now try to illustrate the point with the example of the leader of *Jacobin*/DSA, Bhaskar Sunkara, who recently took over the historically progressive liberal *Nation* magazine. Sunkara has apparently changed since he published an article in *The Nation*, "Reclaiming Socialism" (2015), in which, under the influence of my teachings in Platypus, he cited Kołakowski's "Concept of the Left" to justify his political vision.[6] Back then, Sunkara's influences were Lenin and Kautsky (from "when Kautsky was still a Marxist," as Lenin put it[7]). But this is no longer the case.

More recently, Sunkara claimed that he was less a follower of Kautsky than of Ralph Miliband. This is in keeping with the 2017 statement written by Vivek Chibber to distinguish *Jacobin*/DSA's perspective from that of the Marxism of Kautsky and Lenin, "Our Road to Power" — by contrast with Kautsky's 1909 The Road to Power, which Lenin followed in the Revolution of 1917.[8] I addressed this on the 150th anniversary of Lenin's birth, to which Sunkara and Leo Panitch replied, defending Miliband's "Marxist" bona fides against my characterization of him as a "liberal" — a proponent of a liberal democratic road to socialism, very much like the reformist Revisionism of Eduard Bernstein et al. from more than fifty years earlier.[9] Miliband's idea, with which Sunkara, Chibber and Panitch agreed, was that the capitalist state could not be overthrown and replaced by the working class's own organizations in the dictatorship of the proletariat, but had to be worked through existing liberal democratic electoral means to a potential transformation of society — the endless dream of reformist social democracy (through the Democratic Party of all vehicles!) that has ensnared the Millennial Left like the generations before them. Most recently, Sunkara said that socialism was probably ultimately impossible in the U.S., but at least some "social democracy" was possible, by which he meant public sector and welfare state expansion.[10] This was an abandonment of Marxist ideas, or at least of their current relevance politically.

Perhaps Sunkara thinks he has remained consistent, but there seems to be some change of mind. Perhaps not in principle — perhaps he still finds socialism desirable but not possible, and ultimately not necessary to meet the needs of the present — but certainly in terms of practical politics and what he takes to be the "art of the possible," which is the essence of politics. In so doing, he has abandoned the Left's role in pushing — and transcending — the envelope of possibility and realizing hitherto unrealized potentials, not even necessarily in changing society but merely in renewing the Left and socialism or Marxism as a political tendency. Sunkara has abandoned the task of building a socialist party. Instead, Sunkara et al. among the Millennial Left have fallen back upon the dead traditions of the past post-Marxist "Left" — accepting and reinforcing the liquidation of proletarian socialism over the course of the past century, since Lenin's time. This is why and how it takes the form of calls for a "new New Deal" etc.[11]

This downward trajectory in perspectives is a significant degeneration of consciousness on the part of a key leader of the Millennial Left. Five years ago I called it the death of the Millennial Left, in its liquidation into the Democratic Party.[12] It has only grown worse since then. I take Cryptofash's objection to "Leftism" to be a symptomatic phenomenon of the same degeneration, but one which throws the baby out with the bathwater, in rejecting *Jacobin*/DSA's road back to the Democrats. Cryptofash derogates consciousness by calling it "idealistic" and "metaphysical," an "abstract" and so supposedly unreal "essence." But then one must ask what the purpose of Cryptofash's own writings is. What is the point of his arguments if all that matters is "material reality"? Indeed, in prioritizing empirical reality over consciousness, Cryptofash follows the present dead "Left's" lead into accommodating the power of the status quo, abandoning the consciousness of how it could and should be changed — first of all, how the present "Left" must be fundamentally changed. Cryptofash's "anti-Leftist Marxism" merely strikes a pose against the "Left."

Marx followed Kant and Hegel's — modern German Idealism's — and bourgeois thought's more general sense of the task of "consciousness" as the necessity of freedom: the struggle for freedom is motivated by consciousness of necessity. And the highest necessity is not base "material" need — the animal survival of the workers — but rather *freedom*: the necessity of changing the world, specifically of overcoming capitalism. It was a matter of Rousseau's "general will" of society as more than the sum of its parts in the wills of its members, Kant's "transcendental subject" of freedom, and Hegel's "objective mind" (*Geist*, Spirit) as it develops in history. Marxism's consciousness of "communism" was more specifically — and empirically — that of a political outlook and strategy for pursuing it and the reasons for this historically. Marx did not invent communism, which predated him, but *critiqued* it. Marx's was moreover a "historical" critique of existing society in the contradictions of capitalism to be overcome, a "historical consciousness" or "consciousness of history" and its tasks: why socialism or communism arose as an ideology in the very specific phase of history in the Industrial Revolution. Marx thought that the world had only to recognize what it was struggling for in order to realize it.[13] Marx found the existing communist consciousness of his time to be lacking: its call to abolish private property resulted in a reification of labor rather than its overcoming, especially since capitalism itself already abolished private property.[14] But he thought that proletarian socialism as a movement was capable of learning the bitter lessons of its struggles — why it remained trapped in its opposition to and within capitalism. This learning process was the subjective factor of history. But what can be learned can also be unlearned.

Cryptofash exhibits a striking "historical" liquidation of the historical, reducing things like the splits of Marxism in revolution and civil war as mere "context," which ends up affirming whatever happened. — I am reminded of my late professor Moishe Postone saying that capitalism will be overcome when it is good and ready, despite what the Left wants or thinks. The Marxist critique of history is lacking. The fact is that the workers' movement for socialism has up to now failed, and this has affected history. The issue is the objective vs. subjective character of the proletarianized working class in capitalism. — In his last interview before he died, Postone claimed that we were presently witnessing the historical liquidation of the working class.[15] But for that to actually happen would require a subjective political act, leading to actually overcoming capitalism, since capitalism can objectively by (Marx's) definition not do without workers. As long as there are desperately poor people willing or able to have their labor exploited, capitalism will continue — until the workers themselves put a stop to it. There is a necessity of politically achieving the dictatorship of the proletariat.[16] Communism as the "real movement of history" according to Marx is not merely an objective but a subjective issue: "theory gripping the masses" as a "material force"[17] also means the masses grasping theory — or at least a political ideology. That's the role of the Left.

Antonio Negri had an idea that we were already living in communism but just didn't realize it.[18] But the point of the Left is to realize it — not in the sense of just an idea or change of "consciousness" in the colloquial sense, but a critical theory helping make it happen in reality, in practice. The working class won't be able to do so without a Left, without a theory of what they are trying to do in practice. Cryptofash's desire to proceed separately from and in opposition to the Left, and without the necessity of Left theory and ideas, expects communism to happen on its own — with people as not the subjects but the objects of history. But people have perspectives and ideas, and those ideas and perspectives matter. We cannot afford to abdicate on helping to provide them. They are affected by the history of the Left and the historical self-liquidation of Marxism, which is not merely past but a continuing obstacle to the future.[19] The Left's corpse is not something we can ignore.[20] We must remember history. **|P**

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[1] "The Left is not the Right," March 10, 2022, available online at <https://antileftistmarx.substack.com/p/the-left-is-not-the-right>.

[2] See "Platypus Group: Pseudo-Marxist, Pro-Imperialist, Academic Claptrap," *Workers Vanguard* 908 (February 15, 2008), available online at <https://www.icl-fi.org/english/wv/908/ysp-platypus.html>, where they wrote that "For Platypus, the fundamental social divide is not the class struggle of proletariat vs. bourgeoisie, but an amorphous and classless contest of 'Left' vs. 'Right'."

[3] See Benanav's remarks on the panel discussion "Program and utopia," *Platypus Review* 58 (July 2015), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2013/07/01/program-and-utopia/>.

[4] See *The Decline of the Left in the 20th Century: Toward a Theory of Historical Regression*, *Platypus Review* 17 (November 2009), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/the-decline-of-the-left-in-the-20th-century/>.

[5] "The Left is a concept — but social revolution is not: A response to 'Benedict Cryptofash'," *Platypus Review* 143 (February 2022), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2022/02/01/the-left-is-a-concept-but-social-revolution-is-not-a-response-to-benedict-cryptofash/>.

[6] *The Nation*, 150th Anniversary Issue 300.14 (April 6, 2015), March 23, 2015, available online at <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/red-any-other-name/>.

[7] "I. In What Sense We Can Speak of the International Significance of the Russian Revolution," in *"Left-Wing" Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/ch01.htm>.

[8] *Jacobin*, December 5, 2017, available online at <https://jacobinmag.com/2017/12/our-road-to-power>.

[9] See my "Lenin today," *Platypus Review* 126 (May 2020), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2020/05/01/lenin-today/>.

[10] "The Promise (and Limits) of Social Democracy," *The Jacobin Show*, June 6, 2021, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLl2fAydnhE>. — Actually, I don't know when and where Bhaskar said this exactly; I couldn't find it when looking for it now. Perhaps it was something I dreamed in the haze of the COVID pandemic lockdown. But I'm pretty sure he said it in some context or other, and it struck and stuck with me. See also "Biden Offers Fiscal Liberalism, not Social Democracy," *Jacobin Show*, June 7, 2021, available online at <https://youtu.be/uTBGqc0O3oI>.

[11] See my "The end of the Gilded Age: Discontents of the Second Industrial Revolution today," *Platypus Review* 102 (December 2017 – January 2018), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2017/12/02/end-gilded-age-discontents-second-industrial-revolution-today/>.

[12] See my "The Millennial Left is dead," *Platypus Review* 100 (October 2017), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2017/10/01/millennial-left-dead/>.

[13] See Marx's September 1843 letter to Arnold Ruge, "For the ruthless criticism of everything existing," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1978), 12–15, available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09.htm>.

[14] Marx and Engels, "II. Proletarians and Communists," in *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch02.htm>.

[15] "Marx in the Age of Trump," Vienna Humanities Festival: Hope and Despair, September 17, 2017, available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OJIaze-C2Qs>.

[16] See my "The dictatorship of the proletariat and the death of the Left," *Platypus Review* 141 (November 2021), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2021/11/01/the-dictatorship-of-the-proletariat-and-the-death-of-the-left/>.

[17] Marx, "Contribution to a Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*" (1843), available online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>.

[18] See Michael Hardt and Negri's books *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004) and *Commonwealth* (2009) where this is elaborated.

[19] See my "Remember the future! A rejoinder to Peter Hudis on 'Capital in history'," *Platypus Review* 8 (November 2008), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2008/11/01/remember-the-future-a-rejoinder-to-peter-hudis-on-capital-in-history/>.

[20] See my "Vicissitudes of historical consciousness and possibilities for emancipatory politics today: 'The Left is dead! — Long live the Left!,'" *Platypus Review* 1 (November 2007), available online at <https://platypus1917.org/2007/11/01/vicissitudes-of-historical-consciousness-and-possibilities-for-emancipatory-social-politics-today/>.

"The pandemic and the Left" cont. from page 1

system.[16] Although vaccination is helpful, the Delta mutation has spread all over Europe despite high vaccination rates, indicating that vaccines will not end the pandemic. If vaccination is not enough to get us out of the pandemic, why make it mandatory? After all, its authoritarian imposition rather discourages people from being vaccinated as many people react to authoritarianism.

The demonization of the unvaccinated

The media and the proponents of the measures tend to portray any citizens skeptical of the measures as paranoid conspiracy theorists who deny the scientific rationality of pandemic experts. This presentation is incorrect. Citizen skepticism has varying degrees: from skepticism towards specific pandemic management measures to skepticism towards the existence of the virus, or even to the adoption of theories of deliberate construction of the virus for nefarious purposes. Therefore, the skeptics and conspiracy theorists are not a homogeneous group. Or better, not all skeptics are conspiracy theorists.

Many people think that the virus exists and is dangerous, but they do not agree with the way the pandemic is being managed. They agree that some measures are needed in response to the pandemic, but they disagree or have disagreed with lockdowns, curfews, bans on demonstrations, mandatory vaccination, etc. These people criticize the management of the pandemic as authoritarian, racist, and irrational, speaking from the point of view of human rights and freedoms.[17] It does not make sense to consider exponents of this point of view as paranoid conspiracy theorists.

Unfortunately, there is also a significant portion of people who deny the existence of a pandemic and embrace more or less improbable conspiracy theories. In my opinion, although the attitude of these citizens has irrational characteristics, it also contains an important rational kernel. I think it makes perfect sense for a citizen not to trust what her government and the mainstream media are telling her about the pandemic. This is true all over the world, but especially for citizens of countries such as Cyprus, Greece, and the U.S., as they know that their state is highly corrupt, incompetent, and unreliable. If a state, after having clearly shown that it does not serve the good of its citizens, asks those citizens to radically change their way of life for the worse and sacrifice their basic freedoms, it makes sense for them to react with suspicion. This suspicion seems even more rational when we consider the contradictory measures that have been imposed in various countries, the constant changes in these measures, and the many times that governments rushed to tell us that the pandemic is ending.

The state's response to citizens' suspicion is to demonize them as paranoid conspiracy theorists. The state uses its influence in the media to present any criticism of the measures and any mobilization against them as irrational and socially dangerous, overemphasizing the presence of a minority of anti-vaxxers and conspiracy theorists. This was its stance with both Right-wing and Left-wing mobilizations in Cyprus and Greece. It betrays that the state's goal is to divide the citizens into two rival camps — responsible law-abiding citizens on the one hand, and irresponsible conspiracy theorists on the other — within the framework of the classic "divide and rule" tactic. By demonizing skeptics the state succeeds in directing the dissatisfaction of the public with the virus to them, thus avoiding being itself the recipient of the dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, the vast majority of supporters of the measures are content with state propaganda on the issue without examining it further. Most people who shrilly tell us to get vaccinated are not more knowledgeable about the pandemic than those skeptical of the measures — far from it. Most people who trust and follow the management do it blindly. They lack the knowledge and critical thinking to judge whether what the "experts" and the scientists are telling us is true. So the distinction between rational law-abiding citizens and irrational conspiracy theorists is meaningless. At least the people who are critical of the handling of the pandemic have shown some reflexes against the violation of their civil rights and way of life. The more irrational are those who follow the measures indiscriminately, not those who face them with suspicion.

What the pandemic taught us about the capitalist society we live in today

The coronavirus pandemic exposed and intensified various trends of contemporary capitalist reality. First of all, it made even clearer the inability of the bourgeoisie to rule. Contrary to voices from the so-called autonomist Left who claim that the pandemic is a plan of the bourgeois elites to strengthen their social dominance in times of crisis, quite the opposite seems to be true: the pandemic is a sign that the bourgeoisie and its bureaucrats do not have everything under control. The incompetence, the myopic micropolitics, and the particular interests of various lobbies of capitalists and bureaucrats (e.g., the opportunism of the big pharmaceutical industry for the sake of profit) are a much more likely explanation for the pandemic's authoritarian mismanagement than any other theory. After all, in the absence of a labor movement, the social sovereignty of capital and its austerity policies have not been challenged for a long time.[18] As aforementioned, several of the most developed western nations such as the U.S., Australia, etc. have shown themselves incapable of managing the pandemic rationally and effectively, issuing spasmodic and contradictory measures or trying to exploit the pandemic politically. The structural contradiction between the global interdependent economy and the nation-state system makes pandemic management even more difficult. The pandemic requires a coordinated international response, but in a system of imperialist rivalries (e.g., U.S.–China, U.S.–Russia) between competing nation-states, this is impossible.

The states that did best were the ones that had disciplined citizens who trusted them. Various studies have consistently found that a lack of trust in the authorities is one of the main reasons people refuse to get vaccinated. This is not surprising, since few of us have more than a vague understanding of how vaccines work. This leaves people with the need to trust the scientists who test the vaccine and the authorities that approve and distribute it. In such cases, transparent communication regarding all aspects of the vaccine — including any negative ones — is key for maintaining trust, even if it reduces vaccine acceptance in the short term. Surveys emphasize that trust between citizens and authorities is ideally reciprocal, as authorities need to trust that citizens can deal with bad news and make responsible decisions. The case of Denmark is indicative. Denmark could afford to be more liberal in its approach than other states, increasingly relying on voluntary compliance rather than restricting individual freedoms by decree, because it is generally more authoritarian — with a very homogeneous, very docile population that has, for example, very low tolerance for religious or cultural diversity and very little political diversity.[19]

Most states, however, pursued an authoritarian, technocratic management. Perhaps what is happening is that bourgeois states are reacting in an authoritarian manner to the pandemic precisely due to their inability to handle it effectively. They are incapable of following any other path than the easy path of authoritarianism. Behind state authoritarianism lies the weakness and nakedness of the bourgeoisie. We live in a time of crisis for neoliberalism which is characterized by a lack of trust between citizens and rulers. The lack of trust forces technocrats to manipulate us through lies, telling us, for example, that the vaccines will end the pandemic so that we rush to get vaccinated.

Central to the management of the pandemic is the unprecedented collapse of liberalism as an ideology. In recent years we have witnessed the gradual disappearance of liberal ideology, with so-called progressives, feminists, and the Left responding to liberal principles such as freedom of speech and the presumption of innocence with growing suspicion and contempt. While caring for their own rights and the rights of minorities, they believe that those who disagree with them politically or ideologically do not deserve such rights. The progressives and the Left have embraced political correctness and social cannibalism, leaving the profession of liberal ideals to the Right and to conspiracy theorists. This development could not but have an impact on pandemic management. With the collapse of the social pole that has traditionally defended human rights, health and the economy have become the only factors in decision-making concerning the pandemic, with rights and freedoms being ignored or considered secondary. It is in this context that we observe the gradual erosion of our civil rights at the hands of the executive, as well as the lack of accountability of the executive to the legislature during the pandemic. But health is not the supreme human good: according to Marx, this is the freedom to express and develop our potentialities *qua* human beings. What is best and most necessary for people is to be able to self-determine and develop any of their capabilities and abilities, that is, to be free.

The Left supports the authoritarian state against the working class

The most worrying feature of the current situation, however, is the political absence of the Left. The Left has not taken any initiatives with respect to the pandemic, leaving the working class completely dependent on state paternalism. Someone will tell me, what else could the Left do since it does not have the necessary resources and knowledge that the state has to be able to manage the pandemic? But if we go back a few years and remember the AIDS epidemic, we will notice that the attitude of the Left then was different. Faced with the negligence of doctors and governments to tackle AIDS due to homophobia and other prejudices, Left-wing and progressive activists pressured the health sector to take the virus more seriously, improve public-private partnerships in drug production, speed up their licensing, and allow the participation of patient representatives at all stages of the process.[20] Such activism is largely liberal, and the Left needs to do much more than put pressure on the state if it wants to look worthy of its historic task, but I find it important to acknowledge that even such minimal actions are not happening today. We have naturalized both the role of the Bonapartist state and our political weakness.

The Left not only does not support the working class in the midst of the pandemic, but supports pandemic policies that weaken it. The majority of the Left supported the reactionary lockdowns. Lockdowns protect the rich (those who can work from home or can afford not to work) while failing to protect the poor — the so-called "essential workers" with their families and communities. The lockdowns have slowed the spread of the coronavirus without protecting vulnerable workers, and have had many negative consequences: for example, a large increase in suicides and deaths from drug overdose, people dying from fear of leaving home to visit the hospital, an increase in domestic violence, elderly people dying alone in hospitals and nursing homes, school closures, 100 million people falling below the so-called poverty threshold, tens of millions dying of starvation, a sharp drop in vaccination rates for other diseases such as measles and mumps, etc. The biggest damage from lockdowns occurred in developing countries: 250,000 children in South Asia died of starvation as a result of financial misery due to lockdowns.[21]

The most important problem with lockdowns from a Marxist standpoint, however, is that they weaken the fighting capacity of the working class. Lockdowns undermine the ability of the working class to organize and fight, the only way in which workers can truly protect their interests and health and overthrow capitalism. The closure of entire sectors of industry and services has caused an economic crisis and thrown masses of people into unemployment, while our civil and worker rights have been restricted or banned. The distance work that has become the new normal for millions of workers isolates us and makes it difficult for us to organize in unions, making us more vulnerable to layoffs and unpaid overtime. Mass layoffs, wage cuts, union closures, and the intensification of work preceded the pandemic as social features of neoliberalism, but have now intensified. It is therefore imperative that the workers and the Left oppose lockdowns. Supporting lockdowns in the name of public health is a betrayal of the working class and of our revolutionary task.

We need to understand that the pandemic, like public health in general, does not stand above the class antagonism of capital and labor. The class interest of the bourgeoisie concerning public health is to maintain a healthy enough labor force to exploit at the cheapest possible cost, while protecting its own health. The bourgeois state — that is, the permanent state apparatus consisting of bureaucrats, the army, and the police, in short, the executive branch — is a mechanism of organized violence for maintaining the power and profits of the bourgeoisie. While Marxists are willing to support specific state measures for public health that benefit the working class, the dependence of the working class on the state is suicidal. Traditionally, the Left has fought so that its own organizations are responsible for the health and safety of workers, not the capitalist state. Only through its independent mobilization against the bourgeoisie can the working class defend its health and safety.

Finally, the Left participates in the effort of the state and of the so-called progressives to demonize anyone skeptical of the measures. For example, although the Greek Cypriot Left hates the current neoliberal nationalist government and criticizes some of its pandemic measures, it hates even more the Right-wing, conservative, and nationalist citizens who react to them. It tends to group all these citizens together as dangerous fascists or stupid conspiracy theorists and does everything it can to separate its position on the management of the pandemic from the position of said citizens. Social media is full of contemptuous comments about skeptics and the unvaccinated. Leftists write in favor of mandatory vaccination, downplay the police violence that has often been employed against the unvaccinated, and even tell us that they would rather die from the vaccine than live with people who do not accept the vaccine. The situation is the same abroad. Any criticism of the measures is demonized, and mandatory vaccination is promoted, with the Left largely supporting the essence of state management. Trapped in a superficial antifascism, the Left is more concerned about a fictitious fascist threat from ordinary citizens — the

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